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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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SUBJECT: POLICE-MILITARY RELATIONSHIP STRAINED

REF: FREETOWN 374

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Though a rivalry has always existed between the civilian and military branches of the security apparatus, the relationship between the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) is starting to show increased strain. Small-scale incidents that occurred in September are symptoms of the tense relationship, while longer-standing issues have been the subject of increased rhetoric within the National Security Council Coordinating Group (NSCCG). The recent incidents indicate the RSLAF's resentment towards the SLP and the force's lack of discipline, while the use of the Military Assistance to the Civil Power (MACP) provision on a more regular basis reveals that civilian authorities continue to struggle with their limited resources to keep the peace. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Two incidents in September heightened the tension between the SLP and RSLAF. On September 8, a large group of former military personnel held a demonstration over unpaid benefits. The demonstration quickly became a riot that the SLP allegedly did little to control. Several military vehicles were damaged, and the RSLAF stated their opinion that the SLP did not do enough to prevent the riot or apprehend those responsible for the damage. On September 19, a motorbike rider reported that his bike had been stolen by two individuals, and a group of riders delivered one suspect to the Lumpa police station in Freetown. The suspect, a soldier, was released into RSLAF custody on September 20. The soldier had been beaten by a group of bike riders prior to his detention at the police station, but the RSLAF blamed the SLP instead and vandalized the Lumpa and Waterloo police stations in retaliation: several SLP officers were injured. An inquiry was conducted the week of September 21 at the behest of the NSCCG by representatives from the Ministry of Information and Communication, the Office of National Security, and the National Fire Force. A contact told Poloff that the confidential inquiry results showed that the RSLAF were at fault for perpetrating violence against the SLP, who acted appropriately during the stolen bike investigation.

¶3. (C) Following the situation at a police station near Lungi International Airport (reftel), in which an angry mob of civilians were fired upon by the SLP, a MACP was called to quell the tension. The RSLAF took control of several police stations in the area, and the SLP were relocated to the airport. While in this particular case the use of the MACP was warranted because the SLP contributed to the instability, other uses of the MACP reveal that the SLP have needed military assistance more in 2009 than in past years, for situations that should not necessarily warrant military assistance. Sources told Poloff that the increased use for MACPs are not a result of the SLP's inadequacies, but rather their limited resources to carry out their primary responsibilities. The SLP view the RSLAF as better funded and

equipped, particularly in up-country locations, though the RSLAF would likely disagree.

¶4. (C) Comment: The Vice President is spearheading the development of a comprehensive strategy to address the conflict between the military and police; the recent inquiry will assist in its creation. The two incidents appear to be examples of the RSLAF's resentment at perceived SLP inertia and disengagement at the more local level, which is mirrored in a broader way by the resentment over the burden of increased MACPs. With the RSLAF downsizing and their interests focused on peacekeeping and other external operations, there is a greater need for the SLP to tighten their hold on security within the country. Their ability to do so, however, is hampered by the government's dearth of revenue. Given the economic crisis, significant youth unemployment, increased organized crime, and sub-regional volatility, Sierra Leone continues to be on the precipice between stability and insecurity. Fostering a stronger relationship between military and civilian powers is necessary to prevent their conflict from spilling-over into the mainstream, and will likely be possible with guidance from the Executive Branch. Ensuring that the SLP are given the means to become more effective, however, will likely fall to the international community. End Comment.

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